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ABSTRACT

This address by Commissioner Bell highlights the need to develop a national preschool demonstration model, using available resources whenever possible, as the most effective device to encourage school systems to initiate preschool education. Two facets of the preschool demonstration model are discussed: (1) a learning program built around educational television, and (2) the importance of the neighborhood school as the curriculum development and resource center for the preschool program. A second innovative program, the Community School Project, which makes increasing use of the neighborhood school as a community center for adult instructional and service programs, is also discussed. (CS)

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MAKING OUTREACH WORK*

T. H. Bell
U.S. Commissioner of Education

I am delighted to be here, for many reasons. For one thing, this is a homecoming for me. I see friends and former colleagues who go back to the days when I was a Chief State School Officer myself. Given the kinds of problems you face in the States these days, I must say the veterans among you appear to be holding up remarkably well.

I am also happy to see many new faces, particularly women's faces. We now have woman Chiefs in Montana, Wisconsin, American Samoa, and Guam. In January we will have two more, in Nebraska and Arizona -- six in all. I hope their number and influence in the Council grow steadily.

I have talked informally with many of you since I became U.S. Commissioner last June, but this is my first opportunity to meet with the full Council membership. I thank you for inviting me to discuss with you some of the ideas I have put together in the past five months.

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On this beautiful Caribbean island we are a long way from the hustle and bustle, the persistent problems, and day-to-day crises of Washington, Albany, Montgomery, Denver, and all the other capitals where we normally do business. Those of you from western States have come more than 4,000 miles. Dr. Aguon of Guam and Dr. Betham of Samoa have come half way 'round the world.

We are about as far east as a person can get on U.S. soil. So you have already shown a willingness to support the concept I want to talk about this afternoon. I want to talk about outreach.

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More in particular, I want to tell you about two new programs we plan to get started next year that will add considerably to education's outreach. Both are authorized by the Special Projects Act, a part of the Education Amendments of 1974, but we have to ask for funding through separate legislation.

-- First, we plan to ask Congress for initial funding in fiscal 1976 for a new program for the education of preschool children in the home and in day care centers. Local projects would be initiated and coordinated by the neighborhood school.

-- Second, we plan to ask Congress for initial funding in fiscal 1976 for modest support of the community school movement.

The two forthcoming proposals, in my view, would certainly help schools make fuller use of staff and facilities and, on this basis alone, would justify some Federal support. My primary interest, however, is their potential for improving educational services for people -- and this means more outreach.

What is outreach, anyway?

In my book outreach means to extend a helping hand -- to go that extra mile -- to make that special commitment of time and talent and personal involvement that can change other people's life for the better.

I believe education is better equipped than any other social institution to extend a helping hand to millions of American -- to go that extra mile -- to make a real difference in people's aspirations, attainment, and sheer enjoyment of life.

Education is our biggest enterprise in people and dollars. Established systems of schools and colleges exist wherever people live and work. The network for outreach is there. Moreover, education has the greatest staff of highly trained professionals in the country. The creativity is there.

But, given its potential, education is not doing nearly enough. It is not making the best use of its buildings and brains. Its outreach is not long enough. Not by far.

The real focal point for a sustained and productive outreach to the community must be the local school system, especially the neighborhood school. It has so much to offer in terms of facilities and expertise. Above and beyond the children normally enrolled, it has so many potential clients -- parents who want guidance in encouraging the development of their young children, adults seeking better job skills, senior citizens seeking ways to serve the community as volunteers, people of all ages looking for new hobbies and recreational opportunities. Every neighborhood of any size has many, if not all, of these potential students, tutors, volunteer aides, and users of recreation and craft facilities. Every neighborhood of any size has at least one public school, often several. The pity is that schools and community residents hardly know one another, even when there are school-age children in the family.

When you get right down to it, public schools are probably the most underutilized tax supported resource in the Nation. The average neighborhood school is open 180 days a year, and a few nights now and then for things like PTA meetings. It stands idle all summer. During the school year, many elementary schools have unused classroom space as student enrollments decline. Office of Education figures show about 730,000 fewer pupils in our elementary schools this year than last year. This enrollment decline will soon work into our junior and senior high schools. Yet public elementary and secondary schools, including unused capacity, are going to cost taxpayers $62 billion this year, $6 billion more than last year. This is a 10 percent increase in the past 12 months.

With inflation a very real and menacing long-term threat to the Nation, the President has asked for fiscal restraint in all sectors of the economy. This means we are going to have to reassess the school's traditional role, both on grounds of cost-effectiveness and social responsibility.

Are new Federal initiatives to help schools broaden their community role really justified in this period of tight money and inflationary pressures? I think so.

Let me introduce the preschool program by tracing a bit of history. To celebrate the Bicentennial, American Education, the Office of Education's prizewinning periodical, is running a series of articles about the people, places, and institutions that have shaped our system of

education through the years. It is a fascinating series, one I hope will be issued as a book in time for the Nation's 200th anniversary. On balance, the historical record shows more successes than failures, though progress has been uneven.

For instance, higher education was a top priority of the early colonists. Harvard was founded in 1636, just 16 years after the Plymouth Rock landing, and William and Mary was chartered little more than a half-century later. True, it took women another 200 years to gain admittance to college, a dismal record that now calls, at the very least, for swift adoption of the women's rights guarantees under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

At the other end of the education ladder -- the crucial early years -- children have been second class citizens even longer than women. Kindergartens are essentially a 20th-century development. Even today, 30 percent of our public school systems have no kindergarten program. And the preschool movement is still in its infancy.

Of course, only in the past few decades have research studies begun to demonstrate the importance of the first five years of life in the intellectual and social development of children. Only in the 10 years or so just past has extensive research led James Coleman, Christopher Jencks, and others to conclude that what is done by the family and the home environment has a far greater influence on children than anything the schools can do -- or undo.

Now we know the value of systematically encouraging the cognitive development of children at a very early age. And we know that this

development is greatly advanced when parents are trained to be active participants in the learning process. As we approach the Bicentennial, we have some shoring up to do on the first rung of education's ladder, the early childhood rung, so that it will be as strong as those above it.

States and local school districts have already had considerable experience in planning and operating preschool programs for disadvantaged children under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. I asked our Title I compensatory education people and our Title III innovation and support people to give me a few examples of good preschool projects in which parents have been particularly active. They told me it would be hard to pick just a few, to the exclusion of others just as good. New Jersey alone, I learned, has no less than 455 Title I projects from preschool through grade 3.

So we picked a few projects more or less at random, and I am impressed with what we found. For example, Morrison County, Minnesota, has a Title I home-based language development program for children aged 3 and 4. Half of these children are mentally retarded. Speech therapists go into homes to work with these children and, what is more important, with their parents. The parents learn how to reinforce their children's language skills between visits by the therapist.

Cleveland employs men as tutors in its Title I preschool program to project that vital male image for children who often have no male adult in the home. This program is now in its 10th year.

Parents in Bessemer, Alabama, have shared in planning and running a Title I early childhood program since the very beginning of ESEA funding in 1966.

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Equally successful projects are operating under ESEA Title III State Plan programs. For example, parents in Detroit attend weekly classes to learn about home activities that reinforce their children's visual and auditory skills as well as their self-confidence. West Virginia's state plan includes a preschool program in Martinsburg for handicapped children and their parents.

There are many promising features in these individual projects. Some projects already utilize school classrooms to train parents as tutors. Some already work with parents and children in the home. Some, I am sure, already have informal channels for acquiring and distributing curriculum materials that parents need in their home instruction activities.

Yet there is a critical gap. What is missing is a systematic way to bring together the best components of these individual projects, to add missing elements, to develop a model that can be adopted or adapted elsewhere. A simple model, using available resources wherever possible, is the best way I know to encourage school systems to take on preschool education.

Our proposed Preschool Project provides such a model.

We see a national demonstration effort in which inner city schools in the 15 largest cities, and perhaps some suburban and rural communities, would participate. Each neighborhood school, working through a preschool education program coordinator and a parent advisory group, would train parents to crank up -- in their own home -- an early childhood learning program for a small group of children. One parent might conduct daily classes for, say, eight children -- or join three other volunteers to work with as many as 32.

The learning program would be built around educational television. When you stop to think about it, the home is one of the most exciting learning environments around these days. Children who can scarcely talk are on a first-name basis with the characters in such established TV favorites as Sesame Street and the Electric Company.

Let me say in passing that these programs, developed by the Children's Television Workshop, are two of the best things the Office of Education ever invested in. OE grants helped get both programs off the ground. Two new bilingual programs, also produced with OE support, are previewing nationally this year. Both Carrascolendas and Villa Alegre offer sequences in Spanish and English and are designed for young children.

Thus, entertaining programs based on sound pedagogical principles are available free in every home that has a TV set. Under the proposed model, they would form the core curriculum of a structured learning program.

The neighborhood school, in addition to training parent tutors, would serve as the curriculum development and resource center for the program. Among the resources available to parent tutors might be a toy lending library patterned on the highly successful library developed by the Far West Regional Education Laboratory.

This outreach effort can mean fuller, more cost-effective use of school facilities and staff. It can mean more rapid intellectual development of participating children. And, by training parents as voluntary tutors, it may well increase the parents' full-time employability in related fields.

As I mentioned, the authority for our Preschool Project is in the Special Projects Act in this year's Education Amendments. Congress authorized a number of other special projects in that act, including consumer education, career education, the arts, women's equity, and projects for gifted and talented children. The act specifies that 50 percent of funds appropriated for it be set aside for projects to be undertaken at the Commissioner's discretion. The Preschool Project is my first priority under this authority.

Let me turn now to the broader outreach inherent in the community school movement. To provide some Federal assistance for community schools is my second priority under the Special Projects Act.

Back in the 1930s, Flint, Michigan, showed the rest of the country how to use schools not only for the education of children and teenagers but as centers of learning, recreation, cultural enrichment, and the development of new friendships and associations for members of the entire community.

Through the years some 3,600 community schools have been developed in about 600 school districts. Unfortunately, inadequate funding has hampered the full development of some schools and kept others from getting started.

I would like to see neighborhood schools break with many conventions in much the same way community colleges have done. For example, Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina, never closes its doors. Its instructional program runs around the clock, partly to make use of expensive facilities and handle heavy class loads, partly to

accommodate students who have daytime jobs. It seems to me this approach would be equally suitable for adult education courses in neighborhood schools in Detroit, Akron, and other cities where assembly line workers are free at 6 a.m. or noon or midnight.

Or, neighborhood schools might follow the lead of Pasadena City College, out in California. Pasadena has 71 off-campus education sites -- in churches, parks, vacant factories, wherever students, instructors, and appropriate teaching materials can be conveniently brought together.

Aside from better utilizing schools and providing a variety of both instructional and service programs, much the way community colleges have, a community school seeks to involve members of the community in actively working to design programs which meet the special needs of people in the community.

Through the active involvement of the school and the community, we can hope to bring about a new method of reaching the full potential both of the community as a whole and of each of its members.

The Education Amendments authorize $17 million a year for the Community School Project. Of this total, $15 million would be split evenly between State projects and those operated by local education agencies. The other $2 million is earmarked for postsecondary institutions to train educators, community leaders, and others to plan and operate community school programs.

Frankly, we do not expect to get full funding for this authority. But we do hope for enough money to get something worthwhile in operation.

The Preschool Project and the Community School Project show the interest of Congress and the Administration in making better use of our education resources, on the one hand, and providing better services to children and the community on the other. I hope you will work closely with us in developing these initiatives. We need your insights and suggestions. I hope you will encourage your local school boards and administrators to give careful consideration to how they might participate in one or both projects.

As Commissioner, I intend to press vigorously for reforms we know are needed. I will recommend programs that provide seed money to test and evaluate promising approaches to reform. Once these programs are funded, I can see to it that they are fairly and judiciously administered at the Federal level.

But you know, and I know, that Federal funds make up only about 8 percent of the total national investment in education. They are not going to stretch very far if the States and their 17,000 local districts are really serious about restructuring school programs and staff assignments to give communities the kinds of preschool and community school options we have been discussing.

You and your State boards will have to convince your State political leadership that this is the way to go. The entire process will need to be repeated in every one of your communities, large and small. I am confident that State legislatures and local governments will respond affirmatively, once they understand the savings and services inherent in programs that make fuller use of school resources.

In closing, let me quote from the President's address last August to the graduating class at The Ohio State University. A new Chief of State, speaking to a young audience on the threshold of life, was also talking to the rest of us when he said:

> Let us take a new look at ourselves as Americans. Let us draw from every resource available. Let us seek a real partnership between the academic community and society. Let us aspire to excellence in every aspect of our national life.

In this statement I believe the President recognized a basic tenet of American life, which is that--more than any other people--Americans look to education as the road to opportunity, as the great equalizer that can overcome differences in birth and background and give us all an equal chance in life.

In short, America expects more of education than it does of other institutions. It expects educators to extend a helping hand, to go that extra mile. The most promising part of this awesome responsibility is that we expect these things of ourselves.

So I think we need to tighten our seatbelts, line up our facts and figures, polish up our powers of persuasion, and get on with the job of making outreach work.

We can do it, too.

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